

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WISHDC 8703

INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

S E C R E T CAIRO 6748

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR EG

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN STAND DOWN: RECONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES ALONG THE
SUEZ CANAL

1. FENERAL MA'AMUN, ASSISTANT TO THE MINISTER OF WAR,
TOOK ME ON AN ALL-DAY TRIP, AUGUST 30, ALONG THE BAR LEV
LINE FROM QANTARA IN THE NORTH TO UYUN MUSA IN THE SOUTH.
HE WAS VERY FRANK IN HIS EXPLANATIONS OF THE PLANNING AND
EXECUTION OF THE EGYPTIAN OCTOBER 6 ASSAULT AND OF THE
CURRENT SITUATION. THREE POINTS OF PARTICULAR NOTE STRUCK
ME FROM HIS COMMENTS AND MY OWN OBSERVATION OF THE
SITUATION ON THE GROUND:

2. EGYPTIAN ARMED FORCES, ACCORDING TO MA'AMUN, WERE
ORDERED TO STAND DOWN BEGINNING WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28.
THE STAND DOWN WAS COMPLETED THE FOLLOWING DAY. THE
STAND-DOWN ORDER WAS GIVEN ONCE IT WAS ASCERTAINED THAT
THE RECENT ISRAELI MOBILIZATION EXERCISE HAD FULLY
TERMINATED.

3. EGYPTIAN MILITARY FORCES ALONG THE WEST AND EAST
BANKS OF THE CANAL ARE DUG IN AND APPEAR FULLY PREPARED

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TO MEET ANY CONTINGENCY. AT THE SAME TIME THE SENIOR

ARMY OFFICERS WHOM I MET - INCLUDING THE CHIEFS OF STAFF OF THE 2ND AND 3RD ARMIES ALONG WITH SEVERAL BRIGADE COMMANDERS, APPEARED GENERALLY SPEAKING ALERT, BUT ALSO FAIRLY RELAXED. ONLY THE CHIEF OF STAFF OF 3RD ARMY, MAJOR GENERAL HASSAN ABU SA'ADEH, STILL OPENLY EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE ISRAELI INTENTIONS. REFERRING TO GENERAL GUR'S RECENT PREEMPTIVE STRIKE STATEMENT, HE ASKED IF I THOUGH WAR WOULD BREAK OUT AGAIN. I TOLD HIM I THOUGHT NEITHER SIDE WANTED WAR TO BREAK OUT AGAIN AND SUGGESTED GUR'S STATEMENT SHOULD IN PART AT LEAST BE READ IN TERMS OF THE ISRAELI DOMESTIC SITUATION. ABU SA'ADEH COMMENTED THAT HE HOPED SO, BUT REMAINED SUSPICIOUS OF ISRAELI INTENTIONS. HE SAID EGYPT DOES NOT WANT WAR, BUT IS PREPARED TO MEET ANY ISRAELI ATTACK. THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE NODDING OF HEADS AMONG THE ASSEMBLED OFFICERS PRESENT.

4. RESETTLEMENT ACTIVITY AT ISMAILIA, SUEZ, AND PORT TAWFIQ IS CONSIDERABLE. THESE AREAS HAVE BEEN RETURNED TO CIVIL ADMINISTRATION, THOUGH ALL THREE OF THE RECENTLY APPOINTED GOVERNORS ARE RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS, AND LARGE NUMBERS OF FORMER RESIDENTS ARE RETURNING TO RECONSTRUCT THEIR DAMAGED HOMES. THERE IS MUCH EVIDENCE OF RECONSTRUCTED AND REHABILITATED APARTMENT HOUSES AND BUILDINGS, ESPECIALLY IN SUEZ, AND PLENTY OF BUILDING MATERIALS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO THE DAMAGED SECTORS OF THE CITY TO PERMIT ACCELERATED RECONSTRUCTION. MUCH FOUNDATION WORK IS TAKING PLACE IN CONSTRUCTING A NEW AREA OF SUEZ WHICH IS TO BE CALLED FAISALIYA AND IS PRESUMABLY BEING FINANCED IN PART AT LEAST BY SAUDI MONEY. THERE WAS ALSO MUCH BITTERNESS EXPRESSED AT WHAT WAS ALLEGED TO BE THE DELIBERATE DESTRUCTION OF SUEZ AND PORT TAWFIQ BY ALMOST DAILY SHELLING OF THE TWO CITIES SINCE 1969 FROM AN ISRAELI 155MM HOWITZER BATTERY LOCATED AT UYUN MUSA. THAT BATTERY HAS BEEN DESTROYED BY THE EGYPTIANS, BUT IS A PLACE WHICH ALL VISITORS SEEM TO BE TAKEN TO SEE.

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